WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

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"The Welch Tourist"

By Miss Nina Belle Wurster*

A. R. Welch owned the Chelsea Manufacturing Company, which made novelties, which Mr. Welch invented. Among these items were a knife sharpener, flash light pistol, tea strainer, pencil sharpener, and a metal plug to mend the case of an engine, if any flaw developed in the casting, so it would not have to be re-cast.

Miss Mary Shaw of Ypsilanti told me many interesting things about the Welch car and loaned me the booklet, "The Welch Tourist." I also did a little research work on the Welch car at the Automotive Library of the Detroit Library. Miss Shaw worked for Mr. Welch for several years. She made the drawings for the Welch car, following Mr. Welch's specifications. Miss Shaw told me that some of the parts for the car were made away from Chelsea and that she was always afraid the drawings might be wrong, but they never were.

Mr. Welch thought and planned for nearly 10 years over the Welch car. Nearly everyone said "it will never run." After much hard work the car, just the chassis, engine and a seat for the driver, was ready for a test run. Perhaps fearful of the remarks of the skeptical townspeople, Mr. Welch made this test run after midnight on Jackson Street, just south of the railroad. Among those who saw this test run were Mrs. Welch, their daughter Vesta, a brother Fred, Miss Shaw, and two or three friends.

The trial run was a success and the next day Mr. Welch drove the car up the ramp at the grain elevator. This ramp was long and steep.

After two years of active testing and operation, coupled with what he had learned from both home and foreign practice, Mr. Welch felt he had developed a car second to none.

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* Miss Wurster read a most interesting paper on "The History of Chelsea"at a meeting of the Society held at the Chelsea Library on May 3, 1954. Her paper added much detailed information to the general topics covered in a paper written by her under the same title and published in Washtenaw Impressions, Vol. X, No. 1, Feb., 1953. The reader is referred to this issue, copies of which are available.

One section of Miss Wurster's paper, however, introduced an entirely new feature of Chelsea's background, not previously reported upon,- the manufacture of automobiles! This section is presented verbatim herewith.

In February, 1903, a Welch Tourist was hurried to the automobile show in Chicago, before a few minor details were completed. It was a 20-horse-power, vertical, double-cylinder, four-cycle motor which propelled the vehicle, mounted just behind the front axle between two 2-inch seamless steel tubes, which extended forward from the rear axle and kept the engine and shafting in perfect line with the rear axle at all times. There was no connection whatsoever between the motor-supported tubes and the body frame, thus no vibration could be transmitted from the engine to the body. In that respect the Welch car stood without equal.

The car was equipped with a telescoping steering wheel of 14" laminated wood. The driver could regulate the position of the steering wheel to suit his physical build and it could be pushed to its lowest and most forward position to facilitate entrance to the car. Just one other car at the Chicago show had this feature. The muffler was made of aluminum.

The body of the Welch car was maroon color with black striping, and the running gear was black with maroon striping. Upholstering was No. 1 hand-buffed dark maroon leather on curled hair, and the best full-coach, oil-tempered springs throughout. Full padded arm rests were provided. All trimmings were of heavy brass, including the mouldings around the seats.

The tonneau was built on a new plan. It projected far enough to the sides to enable the occupants to watch the road. The back was very high and closed up tightly, which did away with the dust nuisance.

Laminated wood mud guards were used and did away with all the clatter. Steps were 8x10 inches, covered with rubber, and had foot scrapers. A heavy sprag was provided for hill climbing.

The car had two forward speeds, 5 to 45 miles per hour on the direct gear, and 1 to 12 miles on the low gear, and a reverse gear. Speed control was obtained by the throttle and spark. The track was 56"; wheel base 78"; length, 10 feet; height, 4 feet; weight, 1,600; tires 3½x30". The price was $2,000, net cash, F.O.B. Chelsea. Twenty percent of the purchase had to accompany the orders, balance paid on delivery.

For $85 extra a Canopy Top could be obtained, and it was guaranteed to stay with the rig over any and all roads. A light rubber cover was also furnished and could be put over the canopy and buttoned down to the sides of the machine and furnished ample protection in all weather.

It was planned to make 15 cars a month. Mr. Welch, when asked by his father-in-law "why he didn't make a car for the masses," replied that he wanted to make the best car in the world "with my name on it." Some of his ideas were forty years ahead of his time, and some are used on General Motors cars today.

In February, 1903, articles of partnership were filed in Ann Arbor by A. R. Welch, J. D. Watson, and Fred S. Welch, on behalf of the Chelsea Mfg. Co., Ltd., capital stock $200,000.

The Welch Company moved to Pontiac in 1904. Mr. Welch made a special car for Nat Goodwin, the actor, which was shown at an automobile show in Detroit. In November, 1911, Mr. Welch, accompanied by his friend, Preston Strong, went duck hunting at "The Flats." A bad storm came up, their boat was capsized, and the men were drowned. The Welch Company was sold to General Motors Corporation in 1912.

I quote from an article, "I Fell For America's Craziest Hobby," by Ralph Stein, Cartoon Editor of This Week Magazine and Automobile Editor of Argosy Magazine:

"I was lucky. A friend of a friend called to tell me that he knew where an ancient car, a 1907 Welch, built in Pontiac, Mich., had been hidden for 30 years, jacked up in a dry garage on an estate in Westchester, N. Y. My wife, my kids and I rushed out to look at it. A caretaker took us to the garage and there stood the monster car. I lifted the hood and went all shaky for there was the written about, talked about, overhead camshaft Welch engine, no example of which was known to still exist.

"I bought it for $500. It was towed to my home. After trying to restore it myself, I finally phoned the Antique Auto Shop in New Jersey that did wonderful restoration jobs, but they had a long waiting list of wealthy collectors. The name of Welch worked like magic. The car was taken to their shop and was there a year.

"When I first saw the finished Welch I was staggered by the blinding red and white and gold shine of the thing. I got behind the great, brass-spoked mahogany wheel and was baffled as to the management of the strange machine for there was no foot clutch. I soon got the hang of the thing, and drove to the Atlantic City Meet of the Antique Automobile Club and the Welch chuffed off with the grand prize on the second day of its reincarnation."

Chelsea, Michigan
May 3, 1954

QUESTION: Was "The Welch Tourist" the only automobile ever manufactured within the boundaries of Washtenaw County? It is well known that individuals would buy parts and assemble strictly "custom-built" jobs for themselves. We invite correspondence on these matters from any who have knowledge of them. Even a record of the owner-built cars would be of interest. Address Dr. F. Clever Bald, Michigan Historical Collections, Rackham Building, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Sec.-Treas. of Washtenaw Historical Society - Mrs. I. Wm. Groomes, 1209 S. State, Ann Arbor.
Editor of Washtenaw Impressions - Miss Geneva Smithe, Univ. Museums, Ann Arbor.

WASHTENAW HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Re: Permanent Museum

Dear Member:

A real opportunity has been presented to the Washtenaw Historical Society which your Board feels should be carefully outlined to you. Here it is - we can obtain a sturdy pioneer house built in 1841, which is located at the center of a public park.

It is the Campbell homestead on Packard Road. The main or front portion is built of coursed field stone. In plan, there is a hall from which leads a handsome stair to the second floor, while at the right is an ample living room with well-designed mantel and fireplace; at the left are two other good-sized rooms. The rear wing is an interesting frame structure with open carriage shed incorporated; in the kitchen is a huge brick fireplace with side oven; quaint dormers in the roof. The location (of the house) on a main road between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, is most favorable from many angles. The City of Ann Arbor owns the park - recently given by the Buhr Machine Tool Co. as a memorial to Joseph Buhr, and the Park Commission will assist us in maintaining the house as a museum if we obtain it.

There is ample space for arranging several rooms with our fine furniture and fitments, and yet have several glass cases for display of other articles in various parts of the house. The second floor of the rear wing could be easily arranged as an apartment for a caretaker who could attend to park duties for a large part of his time while his wife could keep the house open for inspection at certain hours on week days and Sundays. With four acres of land in the property there will be ample parking facilities.

The effort should be made to make this house museum a living activity which teaches and records local history. When we know where we came from and why, we can better determine where we should go.

PROJECT ROOM FOR JUNIOR HISTORIANS

Part of the space in the rear wing could be developed into a project shop for use by Junior Historians - an activity now being organized by two members of our Society. Display projects could be prepared, furniture and other antiques repaired and refinished for use in building a practical knowledge of our local history - projects which can be made a part of school curricula thruout the county.

Moreover, we already have the interest and cooperation of the Ann Arbor School Board and of the County School Superintendent. Several teachers have brought their classes to our little museum in Bach School and we have entertained about sixty teachers there to let them see what is available. It is hoped and expected that a practical program can be developed for Junior Historians which will take advantage of the large amount of potential effort stored in the hearts of scores of alert young people of Washtenaw County.

One of our members has developed a constructive system which will permit these young people to construct small buildings themselves for adjunctive use in connection with our house museum. The four acres will provide ample space to do this, while the Ann Arbor Garden Club has assured us of their cooperation and help in laying out an old-fashioned garden.

A CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

All of the above points up an opportunity to establish a constructive community activity of great value in building better Americans now. How can we make it a reality? Here is the answer in dollars and cents -

Purchase price of property	- $23,500
Estimated cost of rehabilitation	- 16,500
Total	- $40,000

The sale of 400 debenture bonds at $100 each will supply the needed money. These bonds would not bear interest but would become a direct claim for the bond-holder to a proportionate share in the property should it ever be sold or its use be altered. With no taxes to pay, caretaking and some maintenance tentatively assured by the City, the remaining part of the cost of heat and electric current can be easily managed from small entrance fees to the museum, the sale of post cards, small reproductions and other articles made by Junior Historians, fees from rental of certain rooms for meetings to DAR chapters and others.

We have just about 400 members at this time, and also have about $2200 in a building fund. If 380 of these 400 members will subscribe to one bond payable over four years, we can carry out this project. In other words, that means about $2.35 per month, which will also include Society dues.

The more bonds anyone feels he can buy, the easier it will be to start things off. All subscription payments are contingent upon obtaining enough to carry out the project, of course.

Enclosed is a blank for you to fill out and send to the treasurer Mrs. I. William Groomes. Won't you do this today and indicate your faith in this genuine American activity which will lead to better appreciation of good citizenship for adults and young people.

Cordially yours,

Howell Taylor, President
Washtenaw Historical Society

May 31, 1954

SUBSCRIPTION BLANK

I believe in developing an active historical museum in Washtenaw County, Michigan, and hereby subscribe for _____ debenture bonds at $100 each, which I understand will bear no interest but which will give me a corresponding and proportionate ownership share in the museum property if ever sold or converted to other uses.

This subscription will be payable to the treasurer of the Washtenaw Historical Society only if a sufficient total is subscribed to carry out the proposed museum project. It may be paid in a lump sum or in equal quarterly payments distributed over four years. I understand I am to send no money now.

Name _____

Address _____

Date _____

Fill out blank, clip on dotted lines, and mail to
Katherine Groomes, Treas., 1209 S. State St., Ann Arbor, Michigan

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Another Patriotic Project:

In 1939, the Ypsilanti Chapter and the Sarah Caswell Angell Chapter of the D.A.R. restored the stones on the graves of three pioneers buried near Carpenter's Corners on Packard Rd. The S.A.R. placed markers on two of the graves. Mrs. C. A. Thomas, S.C.A. Regent at that time, gave field stone to build a wall around the graves; and in 1940, the S.C.A. Chapter made a Memorial Park of the surrounding area, allotted by the County as a protection. A dozen trees were planted, and for many years the two D.A.R. Chapters alternately held Mem orial Services there on July 4th.

Recently the cement topping on the wall has crumbled, the grave stones are loose again, and only a few trees remain. It looks very much neglected and should be attended to. The Ypsilanti Chapter agrees to pay half the expense of putting it in good condition again. We hope to have the work done before next Fourth of July, and we invite members of the WASHTENAW HISTORICAL SOCIETY to attend the services. If any care to make small contributions toward the cost, their generosity will be appreciated. Send checks to Mrs. Robert G. MacKenzie, 1010 Berkshire, Ann Arbor.